

AHAD HA'AM: NATIONALIST WITH A DIFFERENCE

A Zionism to Fulfill Judaism

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MODERN Jewish nationalism arose, like other national movements, after the traditional and rigid texture of medieval life gave way before two new forces: a religious revival through pietism and mysticism with their appeal to individual emotions, and a reassertion of the individual in the secular rationalism of Enlightenment. Hasidism with its closed and emotion-fraught community life represented the religious revival in 18th-century East European Jewry; the Haskalah brought the Enlightenment with its world-open attitude and its rationalism from Germany to the Russian Jews. Asher Ginzberg was born in 1856 into a strictly Hasidic family and grew by his own efforts into Haskalah rationalism. Thus he represented in his life and work the impact of both these forces.

From Hasidism he inherited intensity of feeling, a burning though quiet faith. He always insisted on speaking of "love of Zion" instead of Zionism, and emphasized the emotional and moral tie. His life, like that of Mazzini, was entirely dedicated to his nation-

AHAD HA'AM means in Hebrew "one of the people." Its use as a pen name by Asher Ginzberg (1856-1927) was at once appropriate and ironical. Appropriate, because he was an immensely popular Hebrew journalist and writer who helped found the Zionist movement in Eastern Europe, contributed to the revival of the Hebrew language, and is still regarded as one of the luminaries of 20th-century Jewish thought; ironical, because in his emphasis on the moral and spiritual aspects of the national revival, Ahad Ha'am found himself increasingly opposed to the more popular, and finally victorious, conception of Zionism as an essentially political movement. HANS KOHN here presents a picture of the man and an appraisal of his thought, which he finds not without relevance to the present situation of Israel and the Zionist movement. Dr. Kohn is well known for his books on nationalism and imperialism. He is professor of history at the City College of New York.

alist ideal; he became the apostle of one idea, devoting little time or active interest to broader, or aesthetic, concerns. On the other hand, through the Haskalah he entered into the best heritage of the modern West. His intellectual honesty and self-discipline, his sober and responsible realism, his meticulous attention to fact and form alike, and his contempt for rhetoric and demagoguery associated him more closely with Mill or Masaryk than with Mazzini. With Masaryk he shared also a religious ethicism outside any orthodox faith. Yet in his feelings he was profoundly in tune with the Jewish masses and their millenary nationalist hopes; though he was able to view them critically and with a dispassionate objectivity guided by universal values, his emotions often shaped his ultimate outlook.

The conditions of his upbringing made him a Jewish nationalist. In the middle of the 19th century the Russian Jewish masses were subjects of the Czar, but they were not of Russia and hardly in Russia. Their segregation was complete to a degree incomprehensible to citizens of modern nations. Ginzberg himself called the small town in which he was born "one of the most benighted spots in the Hasidic districts of Russia." His whole education was steeped in traditional Judaism without the slightest intrusion of any Russian or otherwise alien element. As a student he was not even allowed to look at the letters of the Russian alphabet, still less to learn Russian. "The reason was," he wrote in his reminiscences, "that my mother's father had with his own ears heard one of the great *tsaddikim* [Hasidic leaders] say that the sight of a foreign letter made the eyes unclean." Only at the age of twenty did he begin to learn Russian and German in earnest as an autodidact and almost surreptitiously. This learning opened a new world to him, but his faith and

security in that world were badly shaken by the pogroms of 1881 which put an end to the hopeful liberal reform era of Alexander II.

In turn, the life of the Jewish masses in Russia in Asher Ginzberg's early years allowed hardly any knowledge of Russian life or identification with Russia. A feeling of indelible hostility between Israel and the other peoples, especially their governments and officials, prevailed, a distrust and at the same time a contempt for the alien state within the borders of which they lived, and for their "fellow citizens" who were *goyim* to them. The old man, remembering the days of his youth when he longed for a broader education and contact with the world outside, tells the story of how a visiting government official suggested to his father that he be sent to a high school. "My father did not tell us what his answer had been; but he ended his story thus, 'Now go and explain a thing like this to a *goy*!' From the expression on the faces of those at the table it was evident that they needed no explanation: to them it was simple and obvious, and it was only the *goy* whose brain could not take it in."*

When he was almost thirty, Asher Ginzberg could escape from the "isolation and fanaticism" of the small town to Odessa, then the center of the Zionist movement which had started in 1881 to establish Jewish settlements in Palestine. There, in 1889, he "accidentally" became a Hebrew writer, "a thing he had never thought of till then." The pen name Ahad Ha'am with which he signed all his writings throughout his life was to indicate that he did not regard himself as a writer but as "one of the people" interested in the people's revival. Though he wrote much in later years, he never became a professional writer. He remained a merchant, jealous of his independence of mind and thought. Writing out of the deepest concern for the

future and integrity of his people, he never submitted to the pressure of public opinion, "that despotic queen to whom I have never owed allegiance."

FOR six years, from 1896 to 1902, he was Editor of the Hebrew monthly *Hashiloah*. Here, too, he was a nationalist with a difference: he chose the name from the passage in Isaiah where God threatens Israel with punishment because it despised "the waters of Shiloah which goes softly" and instead trusted strength and might. In his editorial statement he omitted all references to Palestine or Zionism. He wished to create an open forum which, far removed from any spirit of party or predetermined solution, would seek for deeper understanding of, and an unprejudiced approach to, the Jewish problem. As a writer and as an editor this "layman" became the great teacher of modern Hebrew literature. He introduced, and insisted upon, a strict respect for meticulous standards of literary form and genuine expression. A master of the cogently reasoned, lucid essay, he wrote only when he felt impelled by a sense of responsibility for the Jewish heritage and for the Jewish future.

Quality not quantity was his keyword for his own work, as for the solution of the Jewish problem. His essays were collected in four volumes under the title, *Al Parashat D'rakhim* ("At the Crossroads").† The book on Jewish ethics which he longed to write was never written. But most of his writings can be regarded as an ethical commentary on the Jewish problems and events of his day. Deeply steeped in the Hebrew prophetic tradition, he felt a close affinity with England and English literature. Of modern thinkers Locke and Hume, Mill and Spencer influenced him as decisively as they had influenced Masaryk. In 1907 he settled in London. Though he was then only fifty years old, his work was done. Not in London did he find the cultural atmosphere of that Russian Jewish environment in which he was rooted and of

* See Ahad Ha'am, *Essays, Letters, Memoirs*, ed. by Leon Simon (Oxford, East and West Library, 1946), p. 338. Leon Simon has the great merit of having made Ahad Ha'am accessible to English readers. See also his *Ten Essays on Zionism and Judaism* (London, Routledge, 1922) and *Selected Essays* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1912).

† The volumes appeared separately, the first in 1894. A new edition of the four volumes was published with an important preface in Berlin (Jüdischer Verlag, 1921).

which he was the noblest fruit; and which apparently he needed to feed his spirit. Nor was he to find it later in Palestine, either.

II

His upbringing, as I have indicated, made Ahad Ha'am almost inescapably a Jewish nationalist. He could not understand that people of Jewish descent and faith could be, by their cultural roots and their free decision, Americans or Italians. To him a man of Jewish ancestry could only live fully and freely as a member of a Jewish nation, and he demanded that the Western Jews emancipate themselves "from the inner slavery and the spiritual degradation" of assimilation and thus become capable "and worthy of a life of dignity and freedom." Judaism to him was not only a spiritual tradition but a biological continuity. This feeling in him was as strong and as unbending as in the Jewish masses of his time: when his daughter married outside the Jewish race she died to him. Yet, as with Masaryk, the survival of his people seemed to him important and justified only through and for the sake of its spiritual heritage and ethical tradition. These seemed to him almost extinguished after three thousand years. To rekindle them was the goal and meaning of his nationalism, of his love of Zion.

In 1889 he published his first article, "Not This Is the Way." It already contained his whole doctrine. It made him unpopular within his own people, and unpopular he remained, as the prophets had been in their days. In his modesty he would never compare himself to them, yet it was as their disciple and for their sake that he was a Jewish nationalist. He demanded the survival of the Jewish people with every fiber of his heart, but in the fullness of his mind he knew that it was desirable and even practicable only if the Jews did not become like other peoples. Therein he disagreed fundamentally with the Zionists. Their nationalism seemed to him based upon an overestimation of quantity and power, of numbers and speed, so characteristic of the nationalism in the era of nationalistic conflicts in the years after 1860. For all their obeisance to the uniqueness of

the Jewish people and its heritage, the Zionists' motive was the individual self-interest of the Jew seeking escape from anti-Semitism or misery and longing for economic betterment or political promotion. Ahad Ha'am never accepted the Zionist position as a possible foundation for a state in Palestine. He knew the means determine the end and the foundations define the strength of the structure. Like all ethical theorists, he was modest as regards the goal and exacting about the means.

"The main point, upon which everything depends, is not how much we do but how we do it," he wrote in his first report, "The Truth from Palestine." The Jews had survived, while all other ancient nations perished, because the prophets had taught them not to seek glory in the attainment of material power and political dominion. To create a small state, based upon power and diplomatic favors, would not add a glorious chapter to Jewish history but would undermine the historical basis of Jewish existence. Was it not worthier of "an ancient people which was once a beacon to the world" to perish than to reach such an end? Ahad Ha'am spoke not only as an ethical teacher. As a practical statesman he understood what the others wishfully forgot: that Palestine, on account of its geographic position and its religious importance, could never lead the secure life of a small nation like Switzerland.

Jewish nationalism envisaged the future in three different ways. Political Zionism regarded anti-Semitism as too powerful and too lasting to allow any Jewish future in the Diaspora. Leon Pinsker (1821-1891) in his *Autoemancipation* (1882) and Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) in *Der Judenstaat* (1896) demanded a "normalization" of Jewish life after the model of the 19th-century nation-state. Nathan Birnbaum (1864-1937) and Simon Dubnow (1860-1941),* on the other hand, believed that two thousand years of existence could not be effaced and that the

* On this leading Jewish historian of modern times see the excellent essay by Koppel S. Pinson, "The National Theories of Simon Dubnow," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. X, pp. 335-58.

"abnormal" national existence of the Jews might represent a higher form of historical development than territorial nationalism. Ahad Ha'am took his position between these two schools. He was convinced of the permanency of the Diaspora, but he believed in the need of a center which would counteract the atomizing tendencies of a scattered worldwide existence.

This center could not be anywhere else but in the historic home of Palestine. It should rekindle the creative spirit of Judaism and fill the hearts of Jews everywhere with love and pride. Such a center could not solve the economic and political afflictions of individual Jews suffering from poverty or persecution. The small country of Palestine could never gather, as the prayer book demands, the scattered ones from the four corners of the earth. That could happen only in the days of the Messiah when all problems would be solved in a regenerated mankind. To confound messianic hopes and political potentialities could lead only to moral and actual disaster.

To Ahad Ha'am the creation of such a center was a necessity for Judaism even if there were no poverty or anti-Semitism. In the villages and cities of Palestine, Jews would lead a full life in the spirit of the Jewish national tradition, and this would exercise a revitalizing spiritual effect on the Diaspora. For that reason Ahad Ha'am called it a spiritual center, "a refuge not for all Jews who need peace and bread," he wrote in 1907, "but for the spirit of the people, for that distinctive cultural form, the result of a historical development of thousands of years which is still strong enough to live and develop naturally in the future if only the fetters of the Diaspora are removed."

III

WAS Ahad Ha'am right in his confidence in a continuity of generations over thousands of years? Did the Greeks, "liberated" in 1821, revive the spirit of ancient Greece in its homeland? Are nation and national language the source of creative ingenuity? Did Spinoza and Marx, Freud, Ein-

stein, and Bergson contribute lastingly and validly to man's spiritual patrimony? Ahad Ha'am was too deeply a nationalist to imagine a creative or full life for the individual outside his rootedness in the traditions of his "blood"; like all nationalists looking to the past for inspiration, he was hopefully convinced that the Jewish center in Palestine would revive the prophetic spirit. He believed in the continuous reality of a Hebrew genius which has neither ceased to exist nor changed fundamentally but needs only revitalization to assume its high moral flight. In this faith he resembled Fichte, Mazzini, and Dostoevsky. Yet he was far less blinded than they by nationalist fervor. The clarity and probity of his mind made him see the danger to his hopes. He warned against them out of his deep faith.

In the first years of political Zionism he expressed the fear that Jews would imitate alien habits to prove they can be "normal" and "valiant" like others. "It may suffice to mention the saddening incident which happened recently in Vienna," he wrote in 1897, "when Zionist students went out to spread the Zionist gospel, in the German fashion, with fists and sticks. And the Zionist organ viewed this action sympathetically and for all its caution could not hide its pleasure about the valor of the Zionist fist." Ahad Ha'am was convinced that "long ago, in the days of the Prophets, we Jews learned to despise physical force and to respect only spiritual power." In it he saw the justification for the efforts to assure the survival and reflowering of Judaism.

In a famous essay, "The Transvaluation of All Values," he turned against the "young men" who under the influence of Nietzsche wished to "cure" the Jews by emancipating the physical life from its subservience to the limiting forces of the spirit.* They demanded

* Their leader was Micah Joseph Berdichevsky (1865-1921), a Hebrew writer of great originality who collected in eleven volumes the sagas and folk tales of the Jewish tradition. A similar tendency was represented in the early work of the Hebrew poet Saul Tschernichovsky (1875-1943), especially in his *Lenochach pessel Apollo* ("Before the Statue of Apollo"), where he powerfully contrasts the Judeo-Nazarene "spirit" with the Hellenic "flesh"; as Heine, Ibsen, and Nietzsche did earlier.

that "the Book yield to the sword and the Prophets to the blond beast." It seemed incredible to Ahad Ha'am that the Jews, who had been taught by prophets and scribes to base their vitality on the conviction that they had to bear the yoke of the most exacting ethical duties, could suddenly transvalue all their values to become a tiny and negligible part in the world of the sword and of physical strength. But did not Ahad Ha'am overlook another and more "natural" trend in Jewish history represented by the conquerors of Canaan and by the Maccabees? Did the Jews not venerate the five sons of Mattathias, and would it not be easy to rekindle among them the memories of Masada and Bethar? Could we not expect that there would be "young men" who would regard the spirituality of the People of the Book as a degeneration forced upon the Jews by the circumstances of the Diaspora, who would follow their master Nietzsche in regarding the ethics in which Ahad Ha'am saw the meaning of Jewish history as the cunning subterfuge of the weak and anemic in the struggle for survival? And that many Jews, living in a nationalist age, would find them right?

The problem of the relationship between flesh and spirit occupied Ahad Ha'am a great deal. In an essay "Flesh and Spirit" which he wrote in 1904, he defined Judaism as equally remote from the materialism of the exaltation of the flesh and the ascetic longing away from the earth to heaven. He regarded both these attitudes as begotten by despair, by a sense of the emptiness of life. Judaism, on the other hand, gave meaning to life here on earth by emphasizing the individual as a part of the social body. "When the individual loves the community as himself, and identifies himself completely with its well-being, he has something to live for; he feels his personal hardships less keenly, because he knows the purpose for which he lives and suffers."*

But Ahad Ha'am was in no way satisfied with this simple nationalistic position. The shift of the center of life from the individual to the community did not in itself provide meaning and justification for the burden of

individual life or for the continuous perpetuation of group existence. Life must serve a higher purpose than mere existence and growth and so must national life. Neither despising nor glorifying the flesh, true Judaism, according to Ahad Ha'am, believed in a harmony of the body and the spirit, but a harmony resulting from the penetration of the spiritual element into the very heart of the physical life, "till its cleansing and purifying influence makes the physical life itself, in its very detail, a part of the spiritual life. This union, so far from degrading the spirit, exalts the flesh, which is irradiated by the sanctity of the spirit; and through their joint life, each closely linked with and completing the other, man achieves the true purpose of his being."

IV

A SIMILAR relation between the flesh and the spirit must exist on the national level. In ancient Jewish history, the aristocracy and the priests saw the national purpose in a state that was prosperous, respected abroad, and secure against aggression. To the prophets, on the other hand, this was not enough: they insisted that national life could derive meaning and purpose only from the spirit, though they valued the existence of the state as the embodiment of the spiritual life. They demanded that the end should not be subordinated to the means, that the body should not ascend over the spirit. In their succession, the Pharisees, opposing the Zealots, cared for the state only for the sake of the national spirit. For it they abandoned Jerusalem and went to Yavneh.

The essence of Judaism—and that meant to Ahad Ha'am the peculiar character of Jewish ethics—was formulated by him in his famous criticism of Claude G. Montefiore's commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, in which the well-known leader of English Reform Judaism took an extreme stand. Against him the Hebrew writer maintained that the true spirit of Jewish ethics was irreconcilable with Christian ethics. The Jewish mind, according to Ahad Ha'am, is bent toward the abstract and the social; the teachings of the

* Ahad Ha'am, *Essays, Letters, Memoirs*, p. 120.

Gospel, on the other hand, toward the personal and the individual. More important, however, was to him the difference with regard to the basis of morality. In Christianity it is subjective altruism; in Judaism, objective justice. Perfect morality from the Jewish point of view demands that men "feel even the slightest deviation from justice instantaneously, and with the certainty of intuition. Personal and social considerations will not affect them in the slightest degree; their instinct will judge every action with absolute impartiality, ignoring all human relations, and making no difference between the self and the other, between rich and poor." Justice demands that man should rise above his emotional inclinations and utilitarian considerations, for himself or for his group, to judge every situation according to objective truth. Judaism furnishes the fundamental principle which can help the still imperfect man to avoid weighting the scales to suit his ends; in Hillel's words: "Do not unto your neighbor what you would not have him do unto you."* Such a principle, Ahad Ha'am believed, is needed above all to keep within bounds that national egoism which he rightly regarded as a greater danger to mankind than individual egoism. Among the Zionists he was the first to perceive, realistically and ethically, the lasting importance for the Jews of the Arab problem in Palestine.

V

IN THEIR wishful ardor, Zionists had overlooked the existence of the Arabs in Palestine. To their eyes the land of their distant forefathers appeared empty, waiting for the return of the dispersed descendants, as if his-

* Altruism would tilt the scales to the side of the other and against the self, in the same way as the altruism of the Gospels favors the poor against the rich. The sense of justice demands objectivity as between rich and poor; neither to favor the rich as materialism does, nor the poor as compassionate sentiment demands. Justice does not differentiate between rich and poor, nor between the native and the alien. "And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the home-born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself." (Lev. 19:33-34)

tory had stood still for two thousand years. In his "Truth from Palestine" Ahad Ha'am pointed out in 1891 that it was difficult, except on sand dunes or stony hills, to find untilled soil in Palestine. "We think that the Arabs are all savages who live like animals and do not understand what is happening around them. This is, however, a great error." The Arabs, Ahad Ha'am was convinced, understood very well, and if they did not protest it was only because they did not yet see then in the Zionist activities a danger for their future. This situation had changed when Ahad Ha'am on his return from another visit to Palestine in 1912 published his "Balance Sheet." Then he wrote: "Many natives whose national consciousness has begun to grow since the Turkish revolution [1908] look askance—how could it be otherwise?—at selling land to 'strangers' and try hard to stop this evil. The Turkish government—whatever its opinion of our work be—cannot irritate the Arabs for our sake: that would make things too difficult for it."

In 1891 Ahad Ha'am warned that the settlers must under no circumstances arouse the wrath of the natives by ugly actions and must meet them in the friendly spirit of respect. "Yet what do our brethren do in Palestine? Just the very opposite! Serfs they were in the lands of the Diaspora and suddenly they find themselves in unrestricted freedom and this change has awakened in them an inclination to despotism. They treat the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, deprive them of their rights, offend them without cause and even boast of these deeds; and nobody among us opposes this despicable and dangerous inclination."

Ahad Ha'am remained faithful to the end. Twenty years later, on July 9, 1911, he wrote from London† to Mr. Eisenstadt in Jaffa: "As to the war against the Jews in Palestine—I am a spectator from afar with an aching heart, particularly because of the want of insight and understanding shown on our side

† In his last years Ahad Ha'am edited and published his letters, *Igeroth*, 6 vols. (Jerusalem, Jabneh, 1923-25), an important source for understanding his personality.

to an extreme degree. As a matter of fact it was evident twenty years ago that the day would come when the Arabs would stand up against us." He complained bitterly that the Jews were unprepared because they had not learned the language or studied the spirit of the people of the land. The same lack of understanding he found in the boycott of Arab labor proclaimed by Jewish labor. In a letter from London, dated November 18, 1913, he wrote to Moshe Smelansky in Rehovot, protesting against the boycott of Arab labor: "Apart from the political danger, I can't put up with the idea that our brethren are morally capable of behaving in such a way to humans of another people, and unwittingly the thought comes to my mind: if it is so now, what will be our relation to the others if in truth we shall achieve at the end of times power in Eretz Israel? And if this be the 'Messiah': I do not wish to see his coming."

Ahad Ha'am returned to the Arab problem in another letter to Smelansky in February 1914. His friend had been attacked because he had drawn attention to the Arab problem. Ahad Ha'am tried to comfort him by pointing out that the Zionists had not yet awakened to reality. "Therefore they wax angry towards those who remind them that there is still another people in Eretz Israel that has been living there and does not intend at all to leave its place. In a future when this illusion will have been torn from their hearts and they will look with open eyes upon the reality as it is, they will certainly understand how important this question is and how great our duty to work for its solution."

In 1902 Ahad Ha'am had subjected Theodor Herzl's novel *Altneuland* to a devastating criticism. However, despite their bitter differences, the Hebraist, steeped in the tradition of his people, and the assimilated Central European Jew met in one decisive point. The Jewish state Herzl envisaged in *Altneuland* was full of thriving Arab cities and villages with a highly contented population that had profited and increased as the result of the coming of the new settlers, with whom they lived in mutual respect and harmony.

Differing in origin and outlook, Ahad Ha'am and Herzl, the moralist and the political leader, could not envisage the dispossession of the Arab people and their homelessness. Such an event seemed to them not only ethically dubious but practically unwise because it would hinder the growth of an atmosphere of peace between Israel and its neighbors, which can be built only upon deeds and not upon words, upon compromise and not upon conquest.

VI

AHAD HA'AM died in Tel Aviv in 1927 after an illness of several years that had forced him into an almost complete retirement. How far has his nationalist philosophy stood up in the two decades which have passed since his death? Has he been proved wrong? He had been a 19th-century liberal and moralist whose mature mind was shaped much more by Mill and Gladstone than by the extremism and violence of Eastern and Central Europe. On May 19, 1914, when the Hebrew teachers in Palestine proclaimed their boycott against a technical school employing a "foreign" language of instruction, Ahad Ha'am with all his love for Hebrew protested: "I am in general absolutely opposed to all forms of boycott. Even in childhood I detested the Jerusalem *herem* [religious boycott], and this feeling has remained in my heart to this day, even if the boycott emanates from the Teachers' Union. Call it *herem* or call it boycott, I loathe it. If I were in Palestine, I would fight this loathsome practice with all my might. I do not care if they call me reactionary, or even traitor, what was ugly in my eyes thirty years ago remains ugly now."

The catastrophe of World War I upset him deeply. He found all his moral values threatened. His physical distress increased his moral anxieties. From Tel Aviv he wrote on March 28, 1923, to Dubnow in Berlin: "I am broken, shattered, utterly and incurably depressed. I am surrounded by intimate and devoted friends; respect and affection are shown me on every hand; my children live near me; and I now have time for study and

for rest. And all this in Palestine, which has been my dream for years and years. And in the midst of all these blessings, I long for—London! Literally, for the dark city in which I spent so many hours without light or air, for the choking fog. . . .” But even in his darkest moods he could not foresee the unexpected turn history was soon to take.

Liberals have been poorly prepared for the irruption into history of the demoniac and of mass fury. The new forms of anti-Semitism, not in backward Russia or Rumania but in Germany, a *Rechtsstaat*, the inspiration of Jewish enlightenment, the home of Lessing, Kant, and Schiller, came as an immense shock. The strong anti-Western and anti-Enlightenment trends in modern Germany had been disregarded. An oversimplified optimism denied the demoniac element in man and history, even where subterranean traditions fertilized the soil for it. Yet this confident liberalism may be far less dangerous for the future of mankind than the defeatist fatalism which would accept the demoniac as a norm and deny the moral and humane foundation on which alone national life and culture can be secure. Ahad Ha'am remained intensely conscious of the validity of these foundations.

When Ahad Ha'am died it seemed probable that the National Home growing up in Palestine under the protection of the Balfour Declaration would realize his vision of a spiritual center. The pseudo-messianic hopes of a vast mass immigration that dominated Zionist thought after the Balfour Declaration of 1917 were quickly disappointed by the limitations which the feelings of Diaspora Jewry and the economic and political realities of Palestine imposed. The Balfour Declaration had taken the realities of Palestine into consideration. Ahad Ha'am himself saw them clearly and stressed them in an introduction which he wrote in 1920 for a new edition of *Al Parashat D'rakhim*.^{*} A devoted friend of Zionism, Sir Herbert (now Viscount) Samuel, said as High Commissioner of Palestine on June 3, 1921 that the Balfour Declaration

meant “that the Jews, a people who are scattered throughout the world, but whose hearts are always turned to Palestine, should be enabled to find their home, and that some amongst them should come to Palestine in order to help to develop the country to the advantage of all its inhabitants. For the British Government, the trustee for the happiness of the people of Palestine, would never impose upon them a policy which that people had reason to think contrary to their interests.” Even more in the sense of Ahad Ha'am's policy was the official statement of British policy of June 3, 1922, which was accepted by the Zionists as a foundation of their activities. It defined the National Home not as “the imposition of a Jewish nationality upon the inhabitants of Palestine as a whole, but the further development of the existing Jewish community, with the assistance of Jews in other parts of the world, in order that it may become the center in which the Jewish people as a whole may take an interest and a pride. That this community should have the best prospect of free development and provide a full opportunity for the Jewish people to display its capacities, it is essential that it should know that it is in Palestine as of right and not on sufferance.” For that reason it must be internationally guaranteed and recognized to rest upon ancient historic connection.

IN THE above-mentioned introduction Ahad Ha'am deprecated the exaggerated Zionist hopes which were countered by similar Arab fears. “The Arab people regarded by us as nonexistent ever since the beginning of the colonization of Palestine, heard [these exaggerated hopes] and believed that the Jews were coming to drive them from their soil and deal with them at their own will.” Such a Jewish attitude seemed to Ahad Ha'am unthinkable. Nor did the immigration in the first ten years bear out the hopes or fears. From 1920 to 1929 the yearly net immigration amounted to 7,700, the excess of Jewish birth over death to 3,500, so that the Jewish population gained by about 11,000 yearly, while the settled Arab population, not

^{*} See “Build Palestine on Realities,” in *COMMENTARY*, April 1946.

counting the Bedouins, grew by natural increase at the rate of 16,000 yearly. Thus everything pointed to the possibility of a limitation of hopes and fears which would make probable a peaceful cohabitation and a binational state with a thriving Jewish community living there its own cultural life in autonomy and as of right. Even after 1933, when everybody with a "capital" of \$5,000 could freely immigrate into Palestine and when the American quotas were wide open, relatively very few Jews left their European fatherlands. Ahad Ha'am's vision of the future seemed confirmed by the facts.

The excesses of Hitlerism and the tragedy of World War II, unforeseen by Ahad Ha'am, by liberal opinion, and by the framers of the Balfour Declaration, changed all this. Even in its defeat, Hitlerism triumphed in some of its aspects, in its arrogant cutting of the deep roots which Jews had struck during two thousand years in Europe, in its emphasis upon "blood" as the determinant factor in man's spiritual loyalty. Ahad Ha'am had rejected a gathering-in of all Jews in Palestine as an answer to anti-Semitism. He had distrusted the pseudo-messianic fervor which he feared would end in disillusionment and spiritual disintegration.

Of the new national mood he had some intimation while he lived in Tel Aviv. One of his last public utterances was an almost pathetic and prophetic protest. It was then rumored that as an act of vengeance for Arab attacks, and as a warning, Jews had killed an Arab child. "What should we say if this is really true? My God, is *this* the end? Is *this* the goal for which our ancestors have striven and for whose sake all generations suffered? Is this the dream of our return to Zion, that we come to Zion and stain its soil with innocent blood? It has been an axiom in my eyes that the people will sacrifice its money for the sake of a state, but never its prophets. And now God has afflicted me in that I have to live and have to see with my own eyes that I have apparently erred therein too. Even now the people does not give its money for the upbuilding of the national home. Instead, there is a growing inclination

to sacrifice its prophets on the altar of the national rebirth, to sacrifice the great moral principles for the sake of which our people lives, for the sake of which it has suffered, and for the sake of which alone it is worthwhile to return to the land. For without them, my God, what are we and what is our future life in this land that we bring all the innumerable sacrifices, without which the land cannot be rebuilt. Do we really do it to add a small people of new Levantines in a corner of the Orient, who will vie with other Levantines in shedding blood, in vengeance and wrath? If this be the Messiah, then I don't wish to see his coming."

AHAD HA'AM'S rank and right as a Jewish nationalist might be disputed. He might have felt today even lonelier among the Zionists than he did during his lifetime. But there cannot be any doubt that this little-known Hebrew writer belongs in the age of nationalism to the small company of men of all tongues who in their unsparing search for truth and in the sobriety of their moral realism are the hope of the future. Perhaps none has expressed their attitude better than he did as far back as 1907 when few other men recognized the danger signals as clearly as he did.

He wrote then a short essay, "In the Footsteps of the Messiah, Impudence Will Grow." There he spoke of the new dogmatic enthusiasts, socialists or nationalists, who were convinced that they knew the way to "redemption." In their arrogant certitude, they appeared to him happy. "But how hard is life in such an age for one who is not of their group and who cannot go with closed eyes in the footsteps of this or that Messiah; for one who does not hear the voice announcing redemption [*geulah*], neither for the immediate nor for the more distant future, neither for his generation nor for the time when his grandchildren will be buried; one for whom truth and knowledge and reason remain mighty gods standing above all the camps and judging them all impartially, and are not servants of a Messiah to herald him as his standard-bearers and trumpeters."